

Planting native trees

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Ireland, a countryside of rolling hills, scenic valleys, majestic waters and lush green pastures, is guarded by its custodians, our farmers. It's a lush, green landscape that makes and supplies produce of exceptional standard, strengthening Ireland's global reputation for sustainable practices, both in the agricultural and horticultural sectors.

Recent years have seen increasing concerns over the environmental impacts of agricultural practices across Europe, resulting in the introduction of agri-environmental schemes – GLAS being one example.

GLAS encourages farmers to promote biodiversity, focusing on immediate areas of concern such as protection of various habitats and species, while conserving our traditional landscape.

One focus of the GLAS is the planting of native trees, which is an important consideration when trying to enhance biodiversity within the countryside, while also aiding in our fight to reduce carbon emissions.

There are several requirements to follow under the GLAS when considering native tree planting.

- Establish a grove of native trees in a single location only.
- Minimum area of 0.05ha with 250 plants and maximum area of 0.09ha with 450 plants. Plants must be a minimum of 40cm tall when planted.
- Use native tree species only, including the following:

Alder, *Alnus glutinosa*
 Silver Birch, *Betula pendula*
 Downy Birch, *Betula pubescens*
 Sessile oak, *Quercus petraea*
 Pendunculate oak, *Quercus robur*
 Mountain ash, *Sorbus aucuparia*
 Whitebeam, *Sorbus hibernica*
 Wild cherry, *Prunus avium*
 Goat willow, *Salix caprea*
 Rusty willow, *Salix cinerea*
 Eared willow, *Salix aurita*
 White willow, *Salix alba*
 Hazel, *Corylus avellana*
 Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris*

- Use plants derived from suitable seed sources within Ireland, which are regarded as being indigenous in nature.

- Trees must be planted in rows 2 metres apart, with a distance of 1 metre between the plants within the rows.



- Grass and other competing vegetation must be controlled around the trees, until they have become established.

The planting of native trees greatly enhances our landscapes and farms, while providing shelter for livestock, screening farm buildings and drying up wet areas of the farm. The perfect time for planting trees is November to March, as they are available bareroot.

Bareroot means field-grown plants that are lifted, transported and transplanted during the dormant season. Buying trees by this method makes the planting task much more cost effective and affords the trees a greater chance of establishing successfully.

It's important to note that the roots must not be allowed to dry out prior to planting, so make sure exposed roots are covered. Ensure there is adequate stockproof fencing to prevent any damage from livestock, allowing sufficient distance from the edge of the plantation to the fence, giving consideration for the tree's growth over the next few years.

Maintenance is key for the trees establishing successfully, so invest some time in monitoring the trees through-

out the growing season. Apply rabbit guards around the stem of the trees when planting. Check young trees regularly for wind rock in exposed sites and firm in with your heel, if required.

Try and reduce any grass or vegetation around the base of the trees, as this will reduce the competition for moisture and nutrients, preventing slower establishment or even a higher mortality rate among the newly planted trees.

Matching tree species to your particular site is key – considerations should be given to wind exposure, soil type, and most importantly, soil moisture levels. We are fortunate to have a vast array of native trees to suit the majority of conditions, with birch, willow and particularly alder growing best in wet soils. Mountain ash and hazel are best suited to exposed areas, while oak and cherry establish and grow well on fertile soils.

By following these simple steps, farmers are leaving a legacy for the next generation, by creating the best natural environment for their families and local communities, leaving a land with a greater value – both environmental and economically.